بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ

نَحْمَدُهٗ وَنُصَلِّيْ عَلٰى رَسُوْلِهِ الْكَرِيْمِ

(*In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.*)

ISLAM
AND
OTHER RELIGIONS

BY

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ISLAM & OTHER RELIGIONS

All religions are a matter of history. If a man must look to some Holy Scripture for the light he has to receive from a religion, no religion should claim our allegiance unless its record is absolutely authentic. In this respect Islam seems to me to possess merits of its own. The Scriptures of all other religions have now been found, as is even admitted by their respective adherents, to be wanting in genuineness.

The Vedic verses are susceptible of contradictory interpretations; they have given rise to innumerable sects, who differ from each other even in the fundamentals of their religion while they all receive their inspiration from the same book. The translation of the Vedas given by one class of Hindus is condemned by the others. The Bible is no more looked upon as the word of God. Even Rabbis and high dignitaries of church are to-day ceasing to believe in its authenticity. On the other hand, Al-Qur-án, the Holy Book of

Islam, is admitted by friends and foes to be the very words revealed to Muhammad. The Book has maintained its purity till now.

Now, whatever may be the worth of the teachings of a religion, I think, one cannot consider or accept its claims when its very source is of a dubious character.

We are constrained to come to the same conclusion as to the Founders of the various religious systems. We know nothing about the authors or recipients of Vedic revelations excepting their names. Similarly, the strictly historical aspect of the Lord of Christianity is not free from doubt; we know very little of him. Mary, we read, gave birth to the illustrious Nazarene; but soon after the event she and her husband fled from Judæa with the child; and after some twelve years Jesus is seen in synagogues finding fault with the Rabbis. Then the curtain drops again. Another gap of some eighteen years, and the Master comes back out of an Essenic monastery, and is seen on the banks of the River Jordan. But his ministry was too short for him to become our perfect specimen and guide in the manifold and diverse walks of human life. A few sermons, a few miracles, a few prayers accompanied by a few curses are not enough to give humanity a religion. His movements are of meteoric character which present

few incidents of note and consequence, excepting his crucifixion. Moses was no doubt a great law-giver, an historic character, liberator of his nation from their bondage in Egypt, worker of wonders and performer of miracles, but not an example for practical purposes in real life.

The life of Muhammad is different. From the cradle to the grave everything of note in his life is narrated and preserved in a well-authenticated record. It is amazing to find in him an assemblage of the best of characteristics, so rare in others. One is at a loss to understand how he could unite in himself all the best qualities of different characters. He is meek and at the same time courageous; modest as a maiden, but the bravest of the soldiers on a battlefield. While with children he is loved for his playfulness and endearing talk to the little ones; when in the company of sages and old men, he is respected for his wisdom and far-sightedness. Truthful, honest, trustworthy; a reliable friend, a loving father and husband, a dutiful son, and a helpful brother, Muhammad is the same man whether in adversity or prosperity; affluence or indigence cannot change him; unruffled in his temperament whether in peace or in war. Kind and hospitable, liberal in giving but abstemious for himself. In short,

judge Muhammad from whatever angle of human character you will, and he is nowhere found wanting.

The character of Muhammad is perfect. His opponents cannot lay a finger on a single flaw in his private life. And whatever has been said against his public career in one or two things, involves really a matter of principle. They say he had more than one wife; that he waged war; that he did this, that, and the other; but before we judge him in these matters we have to decide as to the validity of the principles under which he worked. If polygamy is a matter of necessity in certain circumstances and an economic measure sometimes, then why find fault with Muhammad, when all the great men and benefactors of humanity, especially in the world of religion, have all of them had more than one wife. As to the use of the sword, the whole world until now has taken the greatest pride in unsheathing the weapon. War has hitherto been an indispensable institution. A Prophet was needed to teach the world the true ethics of war, and who can deny the nobility of Muhammad in this respect? He unsheathed his sword only to crush evil and defend truth. With great care I read the accounts of every war waged by him, and they were all in self-defence.

There is something unique in this great man ; he is the only teacher among the noble race of prophets who brought his mission to success. Jesus was crushed by evil, and words of despair and despondency were on his lips on the Cross. Muhammad really crushed the serpent, but, just in the moment of his victory, when the real "generation of vipers" was at his feet, his character revealed another noble aspect—that of forgiveness. No student of history can read the account of the conquest of Makka by Muhammad without bowing down to that great hero. He not only forgives his cruel oppressors, but raises them to places of dignity and honour. Who knows what Jesus would have done if he had achieved any victory over his enemies? After all, he said that he had come not to send peace on the earth, but a sword. Moses, Ramchandra and Krishna, the other great teachers in the world of religion, disclosed not a gleam of mercy in their dealings with their enemies.

It does not take long to pass in review the various religious persuasions just with their tenets and doctrines. Whatever may have been the original form of Hinduism, it is now one vast accretion of ceremonialism and sacrifice. In fact, there does not exist a definition of Hinduism wide enough to comprise all its sections

and subdivisions. Animism, element-worship, hero-worship, polytheism in its worst shapes, monotheism, though not in its pure form—all come under the heading of Hinduism. It possesses its philosophy, but it is a philosophy which has no bearing whatever on practical life; it tries to solve certain riddles—for example, the problem of ultimate pain and pleasure, and here it speaks of the transmigration of the soul; but all th s is a species of mental luxury possessing no practical advantage. Ceremonialism and sacrifices, no doubt, are not without their uses, but they are of secondary importance—a means to certain ends—whereas in Hinduism they have become essentials.

Judaism brought light and culture into the world, but in the course of time it too became merged in ceremonialism and sacrifice. The vice of ceremonial piety lies in the fact that when once a person has observed its demands he thinks himself to be better than his neighbour, no matter what crime he may commit. For this very reason the Brahmins in Hinduism and the Pharisees in Judaism considered themselves absolved of all the duties laid upon other members of society. Jesus did not come with a new religion, nor did he found a church; he was a Jew of the Jews. Jealous for the religion taught by Moses, he came to

redeem the teachings of the Master from the formalism of the Pharisees. He had the courage to expose their hollowness and hypocrisy. In short, his aim was to reform Judaism, but his enemies would not allow him to do so, and so he failed in the end. Then St. Paul came on the scene, but instead of carrying on the work of Jesus, he grafted on the old faith something quite new and repugnant to it—the religion of the Blood and its grace.

It is called the "New Covenant," but it seems to me only a reappearance of old Paganism with a change of name and setting. The story of Christianity may be summed up in a few words: Man drowned in sin and God alienated from him and in anger. To appease His wrath He sends His own son to the world through a virgin's womb. The son is brought to the Cross and pays the penalty for all human sins, thus washing away the sins of humanity with his blood. He dies for all, and then through his resurrection brings new life to mankind. This is the superstructure of the Pauline schism as it was never taught by Jesus. But it is not a new revelation. It has now come to light that Jesus as portrayed by Paul and others as "the new Adam" is only the last of the virgin-born Sun-gods—Mithra, Apollo, Bacchus, Horus, Osiris, and others; all of them

born at the first hour of the 25th of December.

Thus, centuries before the construction of the Christian Church, different countries had already evolved a system of religion which Christianity repeated word by word in the writing of the early Fathers. In fact, the Roman Catholic Church, the first church on Pauline lines after Jesus, is just a replica of the old cult of mystery; and Christian worship remains the sun-worship with all its old features. How can we stigmatize Paganism as a false religion when all its features did but forestall the official Church in the West?

Viewed from this stand-point Islam alone shines forth. It is a religion of action, of good morals and ethics; a religion simple and practical. The Islamic tenets are not dogmatic in their nature, they are reasonable and consistent with intelligence. They have a direct bearing on life.

Doubtless Islam is not free from some sort of formalities. Muslims also make sacrifice, but this is what the Holy Qur-án says :—

It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West, but righteousness is this, that one should believe in Allah and the last day and the angels and the books

and the prophets, and give away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and the beggars and for (the emancipation of) the captives, and keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate; and the performers of their promise when they make a promise, and the patient in distress and affliction and in time of conflict—these are they who are true (to themselves), and these are they who guard (against evil).1

What a wonderful, decisive and bold statement ! It brushes away ceremonialism completely. Islam has a few formalities, but they seem to be essential—one of them being the turning of the face, when in prayer, towards Makka. It indicates the place that gave birth to Islam, and is hence a necessity ; but the above verse says that doing so *in itself* is not a virtue unless thereby we are helped to observe certain beliefs and actions which are there set out. In fact, Muslims turn their faces to Makka to remember and renew the inspiration they first received from that sacred place ; and if turning our faces to Makka in itself is of no value, then what of other ceremonial acts ?

Muslims do observe sacrifice, but not to appease Divine wrath. One of the objects is to " Feed the

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1. The Holy Qur-án, 2 : 177.

poor man who is contented, and the beggar."[1] This institution also supplies an occasion for being benevolent to others, and it is a symbol of the religion of Allah ; as the Holy Qur-án says, we have to submit to His will as the animals under the knife have to submit to ours. And then a verse on the subject in the following thundering words denudes sacrifices of the merits that had been attached to them by other religions—such as the propitiation of Divine anger :—

> There does not reach Allah their flesh nor their blood, but to Him is acceptable the guarding (against evil) on your part; thus has He made them subservient to you, that you may magnify Allah because He has guided you aright; and give good news to those who do good (to others).2

Christianity no doubt did away with all the rituals that Jesus observed himself, because his personal sacrifice, as they say, atoned for it and absolved the believers in the blood from the ceremonial burden. But another set of rituals and formalities entered into the Church as a legacy from Paganism, and the position is worse than before.

Though all the peoples in the world were respectively given a book for their guidance from the Lord,

1. The Holy Qur-án, 20 : 36.

2. The Holy Qur-án 22 : 37.

they are all lost to-day with the exception of the Vedas, the Bible, and the Qur-án. The two first scriptures are of a kindred nature, but the third exhibits an absolutely different character. The Vedas and the Bible speak respectively of some particular nations, the so-called "chosen people" of God or gods; while the Holy Qur-án is neither a narrative of a tribe nor a story of any individual. It concerns itself exclusively with man in general. Man and his God is its chief theme.

After speaking of the creation of the world and man, the chief interest of the Hebrew Scripture lies in one particular branch of the human race—the descendants of Abraham through Isaac. It speaks of the migration of the Israelites from the land of Abraham, their settlement in Egypt. The Bible is a complete story of the rise and fall of the Hebrews, with Moses at their head as the law-giver and bringer of good tidings of the coming race, and with Jesus, the last of the race, shedding tears of grief on their imminent fall. Just as the Holy Bible concerns itself with the Hebrews, so the Vedas speak of another race from Central Asia called Aryans, who crossed the River Indus and took up their abode in the western part of India. It speaks of their rituals and sacrifices, it refers to their fights

with the aborigines of the country and the fiual victory of the former over the latter. Thus the two books are more or lessa history of the two tribes, with the mention of religion and its accessories as a matter of incident. The Holy Qur-án, on the other hand, is purely a book of God's religion given to man. The elevation and progress of the human race or its degradation or downfall are the chief topics of the Arab Revelation. The Qur-án, doubtless, speaks of certain persons and certain nations, but such allusions are not the main object of the Book ; they come in by way of illustration. For example, the Book lays down certain principles and doctrines for human edification ; it warns man against the deeds that are sure to bring him to the lowest ebb ; it reads him lessons of morality and of ethics ; it speaks of spirituality and Godliness ; and it is in elucidation of these teachings that it makes reference to events in the lives of certain men—prophets and their enemies—and nations. It is for this reason that the Qur-án has not generally given full accounts of the people thus alluded to. It is not a collection of stories, but a book of economic, moral and spiritual instruction.

Neither the Vedas nor the Bibile seem to specify any object of universal interest for their revelation.

God, no doubt, spoke to Moses at Sinai and ordered him to go to Pharaoh with a message demanding freedom for the Israelites. After the Exodus, He again spoke to Moses and gave him the Ten Commandments; and Moses when in need of guidance goes to his Lord from time to time, and the Lord expresses His will for the guidance of His people. Similarly, whenever the chosen people are in difficulty or in trouble, Jehovah sends His angels with words to meet the occasion. On the same lines we find various Mantras—hymns—in the Vedas revealed to the old Hindu *rishis*. The Ten Commandments undoubtedly promulgate the lines of action necessary to form a society. But any human society desirous of keeping itself in a healthy condition could have discovered these principles even without the help of any revelation. Therefore, the Qur-ánic Revelation is far above these primitive and temporal needs. It comes to raise man to the highest height to which he is able to soar. The first call that came to Muhammad in the cave Hira is a call for the uplifting of man in general. Muhammad was not called upon to serve his own nation, nor did the heavenly dove descend from above to choose the Son of God from among his fellow-countrymen. Muhammad is inspired to raise his

fellow-beings from the depth of degradation to the zenith of greatness. His first Revelation is :

"Read in the name of your Lord Who created. He created man from a clot. Read and your Lord is Most Honourale, Who taught (to write) with the pen : Taught man what he knew not. Nay ! man is most surely inordinate, because he feels himself self-sufficient".[1]

Man is ordered through Muhammad to read, to cultivate the art of writing, for the spread of books and enlightenment, and to discover sciences not known before, thereby bringing humanity to a position most houourable, because his Creator is Himself most honourable and His creation should index the greatness of the Maker. Matter reaches its physical consummation in the form of man, and Nature cannot improve upon it any further. But the same matter evolves a new thing in the human frame—human consciousness, the sum-total of the passions, which, when refined, give rise to intellect, sentiment, sociability, morality, ethics, religion and spirituality. As a full-fledged man on the physical plane evolves from a clot of blood in the womb, so was human consciousness in " clot" condition

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[1] The Holy Qur-án, 96 : 1—7.

at the appearance of Muhammad, who was deputed to show his fellow-beings the right path, as revealed to him by God, that will bring forth all that is noble and good in man.

This grand object the Holy Book takes for its revelation and makes mention of it in its very beginning.[1] When it defines the most exalted position which man is entitled to achieve, it also indicates the lowest degradation to which he may descend. In the story of Adam[2] the high and low conditions of man are defined. He is the vicegerent of God on earth. He is to receive homage from the angels of heaven and earth; but if he is led astray from the right path he will be deprived of the means that contribute to his happiness.[3] With all our civilization we have not as yet attained the height which we have to achieve under the directions of the Last Book. We have not secured the position of being able to bring the sun and the moon into subjection.[4] This is the goal which the Qur-án prescribes for us in our sojourn on the earth. In this connection the Qur-án further reveals to us that we

1. The Holy Qurán, 2 : 5.
2. The Holy Qurán, 2 Sect. 4.
3. The Holy Qurán, 2 : 36.
4. The Holy Qurán, 14 ; 32-33 ; 16 : 12.

possess the highest capabilities,[1] but, as we have arisen from an animal state and carry with us certain carnal cravings, the Book-warns us that our way to the goal is beset with difficulties. We are liable to be degraded to the lowest of the low,[2] and therefore we need guidance.[3] This is another purpose of the Qur-ánic Revelation. We are in the dark[4] and we need a light, and the Book claims to be that light. Let St. Paul blackguard human nature ; Islam says that we possess an immaculate nature at the time of our birth. Hell is the reward of sin, and heaven is reserved for those who leave this earth sinless. The child, who dies at its very birth, must go to heaven, under Islamic teaching, but he is foredoomed to hell according to Christian principles ! In other words, heaven is our birthright under Islam. We may lose it by our subsequent misdeeds. But according to Christianity we are born for hell unless reclaimed by our faith in the Blood. Similarly, sin is a heritage according to Church belief, but it is an after-acquisition under Islam, and can be avoided.

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1. The Holy Qur-án, 95 : 4.
2. The Holy Qur-án 95 : 5.
3. The Holy Qur-áfi 95 : 6.
4. The Holy Qur-án 14 : Sect. I.

Thus the sole object of Christian Revelation is to bring man out of the slough of sin up to the brink of virtue, but Islam finds man already on its banks at his birth, and comes to raise him to its highest flight that will bring him near the precincts of Divinity. The Qur-án is rational in its teachings, while the Hindu and Hebrew books are dogmatic in imparting their messages. The books speak of God, of angels, of resurrection, and the Last Day; of Divine messengership, and accountability for presentations in the hereafter; but they make no attempt to substantiate these verities by any intelligent argument. But the Qur-án makes frequent appeal to our understanding and rational judgment. It draws our attention to various manifestations of Nature as evidence of what it enunciates. It would not ask its readers to accept any of its teachings except on the strength of reasoning.

This is why modern science has only served to strengthen Muslim belief in the Qur-ánic truths. We are rational beings. Reason and logic play a prominent part in all our beliefs and persuasions.

Again, the first two revelations do not specifically speak of the articles of their faith; each inquirer must gather them for himself from these books. In the

Christian churches the task fell to the Church Councils. The articles of the Christian faith as promulgated by the fathers were collected in the Book of Common Prayer, and have been the object of successive revisions from time to time.

In Hinduism, want of a definite statement in the Vedas as to what were the articles of faith in the Vedic religion gave rise to innumerable sects that differ from each other even in their fundamental tenets.

From such a fate the Qur-án has saved the Muslims ; for it has clearly laid down in various verses the Islamic articles of Faith.[1]

Thus, according to the Holy Qur-án, faith which cannot be translated into action is no faith at all. Consequently, belief in something accepted as verity on the basis of a dogma does not come within the category of religious beliefs in Islam. In fact, dogmatic doctrines have no significance for a Muslim. Faith, however, in the Qur-ánic sense of the word, plays a most important part in moulding every human word or action. All our movements are the portraits of such of our concepts as are based upon sure and certain faith. Every item of our routine, however

1. The Holy Qur-án, 2 : 285.

insignificant, is but a motion-picture of our belief in the existence or the non-existence of things. Any change in such a belief straightaway produces a change in the routine. Even a slight movement of our lips, or of any other part of the body, springs from some belief or other. For instance, we cannot utter a word unless we believe in the audibility and articulation of the sound we make as well as in the ability of our hearer to hear and give to our words the same meanings which they convey to us. Similar belief is always present in our mind concerning everything that emanates from us. This emphasizes the importance of a vigilant and wise choice of faith in every avenue of our existence, since soundness of action follows soundness of belief, and more especially is this so in our religious beliefs, seeing that no other belief approaches them in strength and influence on the ordering of our life.

Every religion lays down certain articles of faith as its basic principles, demanding from its adherents an implicit faith therein. These basic principles may or may not appeal to our intelligence, or serve any useful purpose for us in this life, but it is nevertheless claimed for them that they possess unique merits in securing salvation and happiness in the life beyond the grave for those who hold them.

As to that life, almost every religion strikes the same note. Faith in tenets diametrically opposed to each other in teaching have by different religions been invested with similar merits that are to accrue to the believer in his life after death. If a faith in the divinity of A and B, for instance, brings salvation to the believer according to one religion, it dooms him to everlasting punishment, in the life to come, according to the other. No religion, on the other hand, has any decisively logical support for its assertions. No one as yet has returned from behind the veil to bear witness to the truth of his faith. Under these circumstances one is forced to conclude that a religion's claim for belief in its doctrines should never be heeded, unless those doctrines satisfy our intelligence and have been tested in the crucible of utility as regards our present life. A plunge in the dark is a dangerous proceeding, but it is infinitely more dangerous to believe in things that not only have no bearing on our present life, but sometimes are actually harmful in their effects on the building of our character.

Fear of punishment is, in most cases, the only deterring influence in crushing evil. The pressure of public opinion and legal penalties are the great discouragers of wrong, and wherever they relax their hold,

evil begins to crop up. Thus, for example, prostitution, gambling and drinking have been the curse of Christian nations, chiefly for the above reasons. Public opinion in Christian lands is not strong enough to stop these evils, while legislation, on its criminal side, is nearly silent on the subject. The fear of punishment in the life to come acts as a deterrent in this respect in non-Christian countries. But this can hardly be so with believers in the Atonement. If God could not find any other remedy for the cleansing of human sin than that of sending His own sons from time to time to pay its penalty—since Jesus was only the last of the Pagan Christs who came to give their lives for human salvation—then there is no need of any good action on our part. There are very few of us who pursue virtue for its own sake. It is the reward of virtue, especially seen in its efficacy in counter-balancing the effects of sin, that we fulfil the law and lead a good life. But if the same thing is attainable merely by our belief in the Grace of Blood, few would think it worth while to bear the hardships and trials of the life of righteousness. Belief in the Atonement obviates the necessity for action. So it was held by Luther.

The tenets of Islam, supported by Culture and Progress, have played havoc with old beliefs, and the

futility of such old beliefs has at last become exposed. They have lost all the force they once possessed for the moulding of good character. The world at large is on the highroad to belief in Unity, and even those who, like the Christians, still evince some sort of polytheistic tendencies, are now almost prepared to apologize for them. Belief in the Unity of God in its purest form, when rendered into action in our daily life, would bring our civilization to its climax ; but a lip belief in the Oneness of God is less meritorious even than the different forms which Polytheism has adopted in the case above-mentioned. It is useless to sing hymns at the top of our voices, if we are not leading, and do not lead, Godly lives. God does not stand in need of any adoration from us ; and if He does, He is not worthy of the great names with which He is revered. I would go further than that ; I would say that if our worship of Him lies only in bringing offerings and sacrifices to His altar, and in the recital of praises and thanks to Him, it is neither creditable to God nor profitable to man. He is only another fetish, and the biggest in the world of religion. God should stand above these things. He needs no praise from us. The Qur-án is very explicit on the point. It says that our extolling or praising God does not contribute to His glory, nor does blasphemy

detract at all from His grandeur and dignity. Our prayers to Him should consist of such expressions, whether praise or thanksgiving to God or supplication to Him for some favour, as may help us to work out our own power and ability to our best advantage.

Therefore, if the worship of a deity produces no moral effect on life, it need not be pursued. Similarly, if adoring one deity is equal in its results to the worshipping of another, the choice among them is unnatural. Take man-worship by way of illustration. Jesus is the last of those favoured persons who from time to time have been placed on the throne of God by their fellow men. And here I would mention two other persons who besides Jesus still command human allegiance as God. These are Krishna and Ram Chandra—the two Indian deities—who were adored as such a thousand years before the birth of Christ. Like Jesus, they are Eastern and come of coloured races, but as gods they are superior to him in many respects. They are more historic than the Nazarene. They can claim more genuineness for their life records, though these are not free from folklore. Their precepts and other utterances are, in general, more majestic, more awe-inspiring, and of greater practical utility than visionary sermons from the Mount. Jesus came of humble

parentage and did not possess even a roof for shelter, but if Ram Chandra was a prince and later on a ruler, Krishna ruled the destinies of kings in his time. Jesus had nothing to sacrifice, as fer as worldly possessions go, but the Indian gods gave up the best worldly things in the service of humanity. Jesus was crushed by evil, but Ram Chandra crushed evil, and Rudra—another name for Krishna—had been the crusher of evil throughout his life. The actions ascribed to these great men by their narrators are transcendant. They are like shadows of the powers of the Almighty, while the Bible is silent in the case of the sacred Carpenter in this respect. If we have to seek our God in an incarnate form, I see no special reason for giving precedence to Jesus over others. Our belief in him has not helped mankind any more than the Hindu belief in Krishna and Ram Chandra. In one respect Christianity has been woefully at fault. In the matter of culture and civilization Christianity has proved an implacable enemy to human advancement. It crushed science as long as it had the power to do so, and would do the same to-day if the modern world would suffer it. Only the other day the Bishop of Ripon proposed to give scientific research a holiday for ten years. This was but an echo of the old cry of tyranny and oppression

that came from the Church against culture and science in the Middle Ages, though it is clothed in the euphemisms of modern refinement.

Religion has been regarded as a necessary human institution from the days of Adam and Eve. But it should be treated as a back number if our pursuit of it possesses no utility. The whole question depends on the article of faith upon which a religion insists. If it asks us to believe in such tenets as have come under discussion in these pages, I think we are none the worse for dispensing with it. But if it invites our faith in doctrines that bring out all that is noble and good in us, and urges us to use all the powers of nature, whether reposed in the human frame or in the rest of the universe, to our best advantage, then religion becomes a most essential human institution. I repeat, God is not in need of human worship, but if our worship of Him inspires us to follow His ways as they are to be observed in the universe, ways that work out the best of civilization on righteous lines, it ought to be part and parcel of our life. I would go to my God fifty times a day in such prayerful mood, though Islam prescribes but five prayers only.

The greatest blessing that has come to us from science is our belief in the existence of Law, and the

knowledge that only our submission to it can bring to us success and happiness. Law is the order of time. Every atom of nature and its various combinations, including the human frame, owes its very existence and further development to implicit obedience to Law. From the nebulous stage up to the human frame, everything is a slave to Law. Religion will be doing the greatest possible service to humanity if it inspires man with a strong belief in Law. Virtue and vice, both in their growth and origin, are commensurate with strength or weakness of our belief in Law and its forces. Criminality comes to the surface in quarters where Law can be avoided without fear of detection, and it becomes absolutely non-existent if we believe in the inexorableness of its punishments.

If Law is all in all in this way, and our belief in it is the greatest factor in the building of our character and in the achievement of success, it needs our strong belief not only in its Maker, Who invests it with full force in its operation, but in many other things connected with Law. Law demands as well the services of its "functionaries," who must keep it always in force, since without them it would be but a dead letter. Again, Law, or such portion of it as rules human destinies, whether discovered or revealed, should be

preserved in such a form as may be of service to all units of humanity. It has not fallen to the lot of all men to make researches in the realms of Law, nor to be inspired by the contemplation of its source. There are but a few chosen persons of the human race who are favoured with this gift, and it is their duty to guide and enlighten their fellow men. Again Law loses all its force, and cannot compel universal adhesion, unless and until some reward or punishment comes inevitably to its fulfiller or breaker. Lastly, there ought to be set times for such reward and punishment—when the fruits of submission or disobedience to Law should become manifest to all. Thus if Law is the lever of the whole machinery in the universe, and our belief in it facilitates progress, we should also, to make it a reality in our eyes, believe in the Maker of the Law, its functionaries, its record, and the custodians thereof. We must believe, too, in the reward and the punishment ordained by such an administrative system. For illustration, take any human institution that contributes to our civilization, and we shall find it revolving on the pivot of the above-mentioned seven principles, with Law as one of them. Take the government of any country. No society, even in its most primitive state, can work on healthy lines without some sort of government acting in it as a sovereign political authority. It

works through its laws. It must have machinery to set them in motion. It must reduce its laws to a record—they may be laws unwritten but imprinted on the tablet of the human mind—and entrust them to intermediate officials to convey them to the general public. The government also needs a court of law to administrate, etc. If the Law is a thing so important, and I may say the only key to our advancement and perfection, it should be the first duty of religion to inspire in us a strong stimulus for respecting it. I find myself unable to attach any value to a faith which lacks such incentive. I cannot imagine any greater harm to the very fabric of human society than that which accrues to us by reason of our belief in a doctrine that either weakens our sense of responsibility or enervates our energy and divests us of motive for action. A religion that belittles the importance of Law is best forgotten. For this reason I had to give up my belief in Atonement and other similar doctrines. I could not see, as I remarked before, any necessity for believing even in God, if such belief is not attended with the result I havementioned above. Law and its rules are the main things in the whole universe. Law demands an unswerving belief in its existence and implicit obedience. It is inexorable in awarding its penalties to its disbelievers and breakers. No other belief can save the

transgressor of the Law from its demands in this life; and should not the same apply to the hereafter? Should not religion, then, inculcate, first of all, the necessity and importance of our faith in Law? It must speak of other verities also, because belief in the Law, and that alone, is of no avail, if unaccompanied by belief in other essential things.

The word "Islam" literally means submission to laws, and a Muslim is one who obeys the Law. Law of course means the Divine Law, whether discovered by us as law of nature or revealed to man by God Himself. The Qur-án uses several other words as synonyms of Law—ways of God, His limits and His bounds, His government, His premeasurement of good and evil, and the Throne He sits upon, etc. These words, in fact, convey different functions and aspects of Law. The Law prescribes limits; for no action in itself is either good or bad, it is its use or application, and the circumstances under which it is used or applied, that make it good or bad. The Law thus defines the limits under which an action brings good to its doer or others; and in this respect it becomes a virtue. Any transgression from the prescribed bounds means wrong, wickedness, and sin.

I cannot cite a stronger statement on behalf of a revealed religion and its necessity than that which I find in the last section of the second chapter of the Holy Qur-án :—

"Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is Allah's ; and whether you manifest what is in your minds or hide it, Allah will call you to account according to it ; then He will forgive whom He pleases and chastise whom He pleases, and Allah has power over all things. The Apostle believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, and (so do) the believers, they all believe in Allah and His angels and His books and His apostles : We make no difference between any of His apostles ; and they say : We hear and obey, our Lord ! Thy forgiveness (do we crave), and to Thee is the eventual course. Allah does not impose upon any soul a duty but to the extent of its ability ; for it is (the benefit of) what it has earned, and upon it (the evil of) what it has wrought : Our Lord ! do not punish us if we forget or make a mistake ; our Lord ! do not lay on us a burden as Thou didst lay on those before us ; our Lord ! do not impose upon us that which we have not the strength to bear ; and pardon us and grant us protection and have mercy on us ! Thou art our

Patron, so help us against the unbelieving people." [1]

First it speaks in clear terms of six things written in bold letters on every page of nature, and their existence is palpable even to a most superficial observer, since the denial of it is attended by immediate unrelenting penalty. These are the things in reality that can rightly be given the name of Truth or Verity. The so-called verities adopted as such by various persuasions are merely dogmatic.

The verities spoken of in these verses are as follows :

1. The universality of Divine Government—the working of His Law in Heaven and in the Earth.

2. Our unavoidable accountability to God for our every action hidden or manifest.

3. His law of retribution ever in operation, with occasional remission under given conditions.

4. Our ability to submit to His Laws.

5. Laws of action and their results, *i.e.*, we reap what we sow.

6. The Hereafter—the time to bear the fruits of our actions. It may be immediate, since sometimes we

1. The Holy Qur-án, ii. 284, 286.

are punished immediately for wrongs, or it may be in the future—what is popularly styled the Last Day or the Day of Judgment in religious parlance.

No special revelation from God, no elaborate teaching of tutor divine is needed to bring home to us these truths. Everything in nature speaks of them. No one with a grain of wisdom in his head can deny them ; which being so, the case for religion and its necessity, as well as the nature of its tenets, is obvious enough. Even an atheist must bow down to these six laws. In fact, they are his creed if we eliminate the work "God" or "His" from the above. He accepts the yoke of Law quitè meekly. His only trouble is the inability to believe in the Mind from which Law emanates—a thing of easy proof in the light of modern scientific researches. Even those who take exception to some of the above-mentioned verities, for example, the fourth—our ability to obey the Law—are compelled to believe in the working of these six laws on the physical plane. Everything in the universe contradicts their dogma.

In this connection I would make a few remarks concerning the fundamental doctrine of Christianity —the doctrine of so-called Original Sin. If sin means our violation of Law, the doctrine falls to the ground. Admittedly we are capable of doing wrong, we violate

Law, but this propensity in our nature does not deny our ability to observe it. The whole machinery of a government in human society works on the assumption that the members of such society are capable of obeying the mandates of the government. Without such assumption or belief, the very existence of working of a body like the British Parliament—and in the same category come various other legislative bodies—becomes an anomaly.

We believe in the working of these six laws in the tangible world, but some of us do not see our way to concede the same belief to them in the life beyond the grave.

A keen study of the laws or commandments of God, as given in the Bible, will show that there is not a single word in them that cannot be fulfilled by man. Some there may be who evince a certain laxity in observing some of the said commandments, but the human race is not lacking in those who are or have been true Muslims—obedient to those laws.

But to return. The said six laws compel our belief. If we wish to live as good citizens under the government of the Lord, and attain true success and happiness, we must look for those laws and sit at the feet of those who are their custodians and teachers. It is in this respect that the quoted verses of the Qur-án speak of the

Prophets and the Books they brought from God. The Books came to reveal the Will of the Lord or His ways under which He rules all things in heaven and earth. There is one thing more which is so necessary to infuse in us a spirit strong enough to inspire an implicit obedience to Law, and that is our belief in its unfailing and unavoidable working, together with its inexorability in the exaction of its penalties. In this connection all the revelations from on High that belong to the various religious persuasions speak of certain sentient beings called Angels. According to Qur-ánic teachings they are a body that bring Law and every force in nature into operation and keep them so. This is their function and the object of their existence. They act as a life or soul in everything in the universe. They set the faculties of nature in motion. I do not propose to enter into a long discussion of the subject, but merely to emphasize the fact that if we do need a strong belief in Law and our obedience to it, we can never achieve it unless we believe in the existence of beings like Angels. It was in this light that I have named them in these pages the " functionaries" of Law.

We may or may not believe in any religious system, but we must and do believe in these verities. They are part and parcel of our health and happiness ; and

they ought to be the articles of faith in any religion which claims to have come from God. They are :—

1. Law.

2. God, as the Source of Law.

3. Angels—functionaries of Law.

4. The Books—the records of Law.

5. The Prophets—the intermediate persons who received first messages from the Lord for the promulgation of Law.

6. The Hereafter—the time to bear the fruits of our actions which have been in accordance with or against Law.

7. The Day of Judgment—The day of retribution of our actions as explained above.

These are the seven verities spoken of in the Qur-ánic verses which demand our belief, a belief which is given to them by every person in his mundane affairs.

The present is the mother of the future. The after-life is the child of the present. The former evolves out of the latter. Matter, in its evolutionary course on the physical plane, receives its final perfection

in the human frame, but it gives rise to another order —the order of morality, ethics and spirituality. Life with the progressive elements in it leaves the body at our death like the aroma from a fruit or a flower. It is like a vapour, but it possesses vast potentialities for creating a great cloud full of healthy rain. But Law, as I said before, rules every step of progress in the course of evolution. It is in obedience to it that success or full development attends the progressive element in its journey. We therefore need a system of law that may help us to work out our future life on desirable lines so that we may secure a full measure of bliss in higher regions.

And the code of it must and can only come from the original Intelligence, Source of all life and its progress ; hence the necessity for a Revealed Reigion to disclose the abovementioned verities, with full details for working them out. Any other system of religion is but a nursery-tale, whose function it is to feed credulity and gratify the " child " in man. But the " child " matures one day in intelligence and judgment and begins to see things in the light of reason and culture. It is on this account that religions based on dogma and superstition are becoming exiled from the lands of culture and advancement.

Before concluding these lines I should like to say a word on the Law of Remission as promulgated in the Qur-án. It is based on Equity and Justice, and satisfies every demand of reason. The sacred Book, after mentioning our ability to abide by Law and then referring to our accountability for our actions, speaks of such mitigating circumstances as may avail to remit the penalty of Law for its breach. Says the Qur-án :—

Allah does not impose upon any soul a duty, but to the extent of its ability. For it (soul) is (the benefit of) what it has earned, and upon it (the evil of) what it has wrought. Our Lord ! do not punish us if we forget or make a mistake ; our Lord ! do not lay on us a burden as Thou didst lay on those before us.1

Therefore the mitigating circumstances are :

1. Forgetfulness of Law, as in the case of Adam, according to the Qur-ánic version.

2. Unintentional omission.

3. Inability under particular circumstences to meet the demands of Law.

No one can take exception to the logic and rationality of the provisions. They bring Divine forgiveness for our wrongs, but we must approach the Master of the Judgment for it in prayerful humility. The Holy Qur-án for this reason has formulated the said three provisions in the form of a prayer.

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1. The Holy Qur-án, 2 : 286.

A FEW SALIENT FEATURES OF THE RELIGION OF ISLAM WHICH ARE NOT GENERALLY KNOWN

(*a*) It is absolutely monotheisic—no division in the Godhead—prayers are addressed directly to the Invisible God. Muhammad is as much a Prophet of God as Jesus, Moses, etc., upon whom all be the blessings of God, but like all other prophets before him, he is every bit a human being. Islam has neither ritual nor priesthood.

(*b*) It abhors warfare except in extreme cases of self-defence.

(*c*) The position it has given to woman is still unapproached by the laws of the most progressive nations of the modern world. According to Islam, there is no difference between man and woman—materially, spiritually, morally.

(*d*) It is the only religious outlook on life which can grapple with the disruptive forces at work in the world to-day.

(*e*) It is a widely admitted and unparalleled achievement of Islam, that it has created a world-wide brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood of God.

(*f*) Islam alone has succeeded in abolishing all unconscionable barriers of distinction, based nationality, colour and language.

ATTITUDE OF ISLAM TOWARDS OTHER RELIGIONS

"Every nation had an apostle" (The Qu'ran, ch. 10, v. 47). No religion other than Islam recognizes this truth.

SOME POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT ISLAM

It is wrong to think:

that Islam was spread by the sword;
that Islam is synonymous with polygamy;
that, according to Islam, woman has no soul;
and that the Islamic conception of Paradise is sensual.

THE CREED OF ISLAM

There is no god but God, and Muhammad is His apostle.